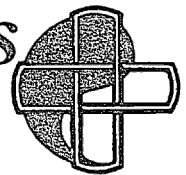


History of Women Religious

News and Notes



Volume 21—Number 2

June 2008

HWR Network News

The coordinating committee for the Conference on the History of Women Religious will meet at the University of Notre Dame September 18, 2008, for the purpose of evaluation and planning for the future. Now beginning its twenty-first year, the Conference has facilitated networking among scholars interested in the history of women religious through a newsletter and triennial conferences, the seventh of which was held at UND in June, 2007. As a subscriber from Australia, Rosa MacGinley, recently commented, "HWR's work is paying off in the continuing stream of well researched and thoughtful studies in this field of women's history." Is it time to consider alternatives to HWR now that its original purposes have been at least partially achieved, or are there unique services the organization can still offer? Your observations will be taken into account by the committee when it meets in September if you will forward them to the coordinator-editor at KKennelly33@hotmail.com by September 15.

Publications

Suzanne Noffke, OP, is negotiating for a publisher for her recently completed tome (over 1100 pages), *Catherine of Siena: An Anthology*. Meanwhile, she is moving on to conduct research for a second volume of Racine Dominican history.

Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834* (University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va. 2007), characterizes this congregation as having engaged in radical religious education, affirmative action and women's rights, pro-black family campaigns, and urban regeneration to become a significant force among the people of New Orleans.

Thomas Joseph McGoldrick, SSJ, *Beyond the Call: The Legacy of the Sisters of St. Joseph of St. Augustine, Florida* (Privately printed, Sisters of St. Joseph of St. Augustine, 2008), documents the history of a French congregation that responded to the post-Civil War request from Bishop Verot to minister to the newly emancipated Negro population of Florida.

Barbara Mattick's doctoral dissertation on the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Sisters of Mercy, *Ministries in Black and White: The Catholic Sisters of St. Augustine, Florida, 1859-1920*, was recently accepted by Florida State University where she received her doctoral degree in late April. She has been encouraged to revise the manuscript for publication. Congratulations, Barbara, and thanks for bringing your scholarship to bear on the pioneer years in Florida of the Sisters of St. Joseph (1866--) and the Sisters of Mercy (in St. Augustine 1859 to 1870).

Ann Miriam Gallagher, RSM, reports that her article, "Catherine Joseph Seton and the New York Mercy Experience," originally published in *The Mast Journal* (8: 1, Fall 1997) has been reprinted in the *Vincentian Heritage* (26: 2 and 27: 1, double issue, 2007). The original article was taken from her presentation at a 1996 conference marking the 150th anniversary of the Dublic Mercy foundation in New York.

Paula Kane has a chapter, "Jews and Catholics Converge: The Song of Bernadette (1943)," in *Catholics in the Movies* (Oxford University Press, 2008, ed. Colleen McDannell). Of the book's contents, hers is the only film and chapter to deal with a woman religious.

Margaret M. McGuinness, "Urban Settlement Houses and Rural Parishes: The Ministry of the Sisters of Christian Doctrine, 1910-1986," in *U. S. Catholic Historian* (26: 1, Winter 2008, pp. 23-42),

focuses on the role played by a small congregation of women religious whose work with the urban poor has gone largely unnoticed in favor of larger groups conspicuous for creating educational and health care institutions.

Eileen A. Gavin's chapter, "Sister Annette Walter's Unfinished Dream 'To Make the Universe a Home'," in *Women of Vision, Their Psychology, Circumstances, and Success* (Springer Publishing Company, New York, Springer Series: Focus on Women, ed. Gavin, Aphrodite Clamar, and Mary Anne Siderits, 2007, pp. 159-175), creates a fine biographical study of a woman whose leadership and ideas had a significant impact on the field of psychology and Sisters' lives in the last half of the twentieth century.

The February 22, 2008 issue of the *National Catholic Reporter*, Supplement, "Religious Life," features a number of timely articles on women religious including "Daughter of Henriette and Katrina," in which Sister Sylvia Thibodeaux weighs the future of the Holy Family Sisters; and "The Sisters' Story Retold," a reflection on the contributions of Sisters to the intellectual and artistic life of the Church in the United States.

Research in Progress

Mary Fishman continues to work with Chicago Filmmakers (CF), a thirty year-old media arts organization that fosters appreciation of film and video as media of important social and community impact, on production of "A Gift of Forty Years." The film is intended to provide a vehicle for American nuns to tell their story of transformation at the heart of the Catholic church beginning with establishment of the Sister Formation Conference in the 1950s. For more information, contact Fishman at fishmanstudio@wowway.com.

Michael Caruso, an associate professor at Loyola Marymount University's School of Education, is working on a project that involves interviewing women religious who were the last members of their communities to serve in Catholic elementary schools. His interest is in capturing a sample of the experiences and stories of this development. He has also interviewed lay men and women who were the first to assume leadership positions after

the Sisters with the two-fold goal of hearing the Sisters' stories in their own words, and illustrating the challenges of a change in traditional leadership models. For more information, contact Caruso at mcarusol@lmu.edu.

Work continues on development of an exhibit celebrating the contributions of Catholic Sisters to U.S. life. Actual exhibit construction is expected to begin in July; an opening later in 2009 is likely. The exhibit web page, www.womanandspirit.org, reflects a recent change of title from "Pioneers, Poets & Prophets" to "Women & Spirit." Consult the web page for current information.

Book Review

The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s. Amy Koehlinger (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). Pp. vii-304 \$42.00.

Amy L. Koehlinger's *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s*, examines the participation of women religious in the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. The book, however, is more than an exploration of the "new nuns" who captured the American public's attention as they participated in protest marches in places like Selma, Alabama. Koehlinger seeks to understand why American Catholic Sisters in the 1960s engaged in the racial apostolate and how this involvement changed religious life.

Koehlinger examines the emergence of the racial apostolate among women religious, the changes within religious life that inspired Sisters to question their traditional ministries, and some of the ways in which Sisters participated in "new" apostolates. At the center of the author's discussion is Mary Peter (Margaret Ellen) Traxler, SSND, and the Department of Educational Services (DES) of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice (NCCIJ). Traxler, a School Sister of Notre Dame, operated the DES from Chicago. Koehlinger analyses the correspondence and other documents from this office, the records of the Sister Formation Conference, and other files to provide a clearer understanding of the racial apostolate.

Koehlinger sets the stage for the racial apostolate in

her introduction by broadly discussing the various opportunities that women religious had to work for racial justice. The first chapter, "Church and Society: The Emergence of New Nuns," locates the concept of the "new nuns" as Sisters themselves understood it and traces the evolution of the changes of the 1960s from the Sister Formation Conference of the 1950s. While not the first scholar to examine the changing religious life of the second half of the twentieth century, Koehlinger succinctly describes the origins of the Sister Formation Conference and its relationship to the Conference of Major Superiors of Women (CMSW). As the CMSW curtailed the activity of the SFC, Traxler joined Matthew Ahmann at the NCCIJ and directed the DES, which encouraged women religious' participation at the grass-roots level in the racial apostolate. Koehlinger in this chapter, however, focuses on the creation of a reform mindset among Sisters, as she discusses the means of communicating the message of the racial apostolate throughout the United States. She highlights various programs such as the Traveling Workshops in Inter-Group Relations, where qualified women religious traveled throughout the country giving lectures on race relations, such as "Renewal in Light of World Needs," and "Black Rage: White Apathy: Christian Challenge." Other means of communication was the circulation of the *Nuns Newsletter*, a publication of the DES which described the work of various Sisters.

The remaining chapters of the book deal with specific programs of the racial apostolate and the challenges women religious faced. Chapter Three, "Vocation and Negotiations: Congregational Dynamics," takes a closer look at how some women worked with their individual community superiors to become a part of the racial apostolate. The chapter also examines the difficulties other women faced when their communities restricted their work in new ministries. Here, Koehlinger deals adeptly with feminism and the heart-felt struggle Sisters had with the individual meaning of their religious lives and whether or not they would remain within community life. Chapters Four ("Sisters in Selma: Working under Jim Crow"), Five ("Project Cabrini: Becoming Sistahs"), and Six ("The Placement Bureau: Matching Nuns with Needs") deal with three different manifestations of the racial apostolate. "Sisters in Selma" examines women religious who

were present before and after the historic march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in March 1965. The photographed and interviewed Sisters of this march, Koehlinger reminds the reader, were not the only women religious fighting for civil rights. This chapter and the subsequent chapter, "Project Cabrini," while examining specific groups of women religious, also deals with how Sisters conceived of themselves as religious, as women, and as white Americans. "Sisters in Selma" particularly focuses on how the Sisters of Saint Joseph worked within the Jim Crow South and negotiated a place within Selma society that was both white and black. This experience was echoed in "Project Cabrini," as Sisters of Saint Francis crossed the color line from their white convent to the black neighborhood surrounding the Cabrini Green Housing Complex in Chicago. Firmly rooted in these chapters and in the final chapter, "The Placement Bureau," is the key element of how the renewal process within religious life affected Sisters' individual choices to engage in the work of the racial apostolate.

Koehlinger saves for her conclusion a larger discussion of community reform within religious life that coincided with the decline of Sisters' involvement in the racial apostolate. Many factors contributed to the decline of women religious' involvement in civil rights, including the decrease or elimination of federal government funding of programs. Koehlinger's discussion of changes within religious life for women is of particular interest because she relates these changes to the development of second-wave feminism as it evolved within Catholic circles. This nuanced discussion places the changes for the New Nuns of the 1960s and 1970s within the context of the larger Church and American society.

The New Nuns is a compelling book. This study would make an excellent addition to a course in American religious as well as women's history. Amy Koehlinger provides insight into the changes and evolution of religious life as she examines the manner in which women religious worked for racial justice in America in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Mary Beth Fraser Connolly
Lecturer, Purdue University North Central

Announcements

The Congregation of the Sisters of Divine Providence, an international community with their generalate in Wakefield, Rhode Island and provinces in Germany, South Korea, the United States/Caribbean, and a region in Peru, seeks someone to write a comprehensive congregational history. The congregation was founded in 1851. They have extensive archival material in Mainz, Germany as well as in Rhode Island. If you have an interest, contact the superior general, Janet Folkl, CDP at jfolkl@aol.com.

The annual conference of the Historians of Women Religious in Britain and Ireland will be held August 22-23, 2008, at the National University of Ireland, Galway. Papers were invited (due by 31 March 2008) on the theme of "Women Religious and the Political World," from all historical periods and from different religious traditions within the history of Britain and Ireland. For more information contact Marie-Louise Coolahan at marielouise.coolahan@nuigalway.ie or regular mail at Department of English, National University of Ireland, Galway.

Extended Note

The process of developing a museum exhibit featuring the influence of women religious on United States history has been instructive in terms of content and technology. Some of our learnings as members of the committee appointed by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) to implement the exhibit concept are shared here to keep HWR subscribers informed as the project continues to unfold.

Our first learning was constant discovery of the complexity of a major museum exhibit project; the second, a reassuring sense that we had a great story begging to be told. As Helen Garvey, BVM, chair of the committee remarked recently, we were innocents, naïve in the extreme when we embarked on the project three years ago. This was probably a good thing as realistic awareness of what lay ahead would have discouraged us from taking the first steps.

Developing a story line true to Sisters' religious

inspiration yet intelligible for a general audience of museum-goers and persuasive to museum directors shopping for traveling exhibits has proved to be revealing and exciting. It was a revelation to see the extent to which historians have documented many key contributions of women religious to U.S. history from the arrival of the Ursulines in New Orleans in 1727 through to the present day. It was exciting to realize what a monumental influence sisters, estimated to have numbered no more than 220,000, have exerted over the nearly three hundred years of their presence in this country.

The story line we first proposed many months ago has pretty much stood the test of overtures with curators at the Smithsonian, Ellis Island, and the handful of other museums directors with whom we tried out our ideas during successive stages of project development from the "charrette" or gathering of potential museum "stakeholders" in October, 2005 through to the meeting in May, 2008 with the firm we engaged to manage exhibit construction and marketing (Seruto & Company of Pasadena, California). The exhibit will begin with a space dedicated to artifacts illustrative of the Sisters' pioneer spirit and move on to spaces organized around the topics of prejudice within (e.g. slave ownership) and without (convent burnings and other incidents illustrative of anti-Catholic prejudice); service by Catholic sisters during many of the nation's most devastating natural disasters, wars, and epidemics; and community and nation building, a topic that will emphasize immigrant aspects of our story.

Next will come areas highlighting sisters' leadership in education, health care, and multiple social services, and finally areas entitled "signs of the times" and "new frontiers" focused on sisters' contribution to national life from the 1960s to the present. A core space toward the end of the exhibit will invite museum goers to pause for reflection on the inner spirit that sustains sisters in their lives and on each one's own call.

The artifacts identified by congregational archivists over a year ago (thank you, archivists!) are proving to be a treasure trove of exciting material, from a letter of President Thomas Jefferson to Sister Therese de St. Xavier Farjon, superior of the Ursulines in New

Orleans, dated May 15, 1804; to the charred altar missal rescued from the Charlestown, Massachusetts convent burned in an outbreak of anti-Catholic rage; to the first medical license given to a woman in New Mexico, issued to Sister Mary de Sales Leheney in 1901; to an infant incubator, based on a prototype made by Sister Pulcheria Wuellner from a cigar humidior in 1938; and a shirt belonging to Sister Dorothy Kazel, murdered in El Salvador December 2, 1980.

Exhibit design will showcase a wealth of photographs and artifacts based on a flexible, modular system including fabric panels, reader rails, and media presentation equipment. Media components include an introductory film, oral history listening stations, touchscreen interactive, and smaller videos with historical footage. As mentioned above under Research in Progress, the project web may be consulted to follow progress as conceptual implementation continues through to the anticipated opening in the spring of 2009.

Raising funds to support a budget that expanded from our initial estimate of \$1,000,000 to \$3,500,000 was a challenging task but also one that enabled committee members to share our story and arouse interest in the exhibit among corporations, health care organizations, and foundations nationwide. Engaging professionals to help us visualize our story in the spatial, visual and technological forms demanded by a high quality museum exhibit today was a necessity only vaguely realized when our committee began its work. In our innocence, we chose well and have learned much! The professionals responsible for our marketing report that museum directors at the Association of Museum Directors annual meeting held in Denver in April were very interested in our exhibit. This gives the committee confidence in being able to put together a traveling exhibit schedule that will bring *Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America* to a museum near you.

Members of the LCWR committee are Helen M. Garvey, BVM, chair; Barbara Cervenka, OP; Mary

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